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Miller J. F.

VOCATIONAL EDUCATION

FOR

Disabled Soldiers, Sailors, and Marines

COOPERATIVE ARRANGEMENT BETWEEN THE FEDERAL BOARD FOR
VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND THE BENEVOLENT AND
PROTECTIVE ORDER OF ELKS OF THE
UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

SPEECH

OF

HON. JOHN F. MILLER

OF WASHINGTON

IN THE

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

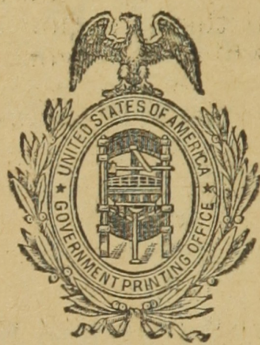
MONDAY, MARCH 3, 1919



WASHINGTON

1919

110436—19396



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SPEECH

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HON. JOHN F. MILLER,
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Mr. MILLER of Washington. Mr. Speaker, there is no more important work being carried on in this country at the present time than that being done by the Federal Board for Vocational Education in the reeducation of disabled soldiers, sailors, and marines. I desire to call the attention of the Congress and the country to the way in which this work is being expedited and perfected through a cooperative arrangement between the Federal board and a patriotic private agency.

Heretofore the plight of the disabled soldier has not been a happy one. The Government was grateful to him for the sacrifice he had made and did its best to atone to him and requite him. It used the only means it knew of, and that was a monetary pension, usually inadequate, and, at best, a poor return. For those who were so badly disabled that they could not work, soldier's homes were provided, but the home provided by the Government was not, at best, the kind of home the soldier would provide for himself. These soldier's homes filled with men without vocational training and with no physical activities of a useful character, and without any home influences about them, failed to bring to the soldier the personal peace of mind so essential to his happiness and well-being.

In the war which has just come to a conclusion it was found quite by accident that disabled men could be retrained and taught to do some one thing as well as a man who had never been injured. This discovery was made in France at the home of M. Schollaert, a Belgian gentleman, who took in and cared for a number of disabled, wounded Belgian soldiers who had no asylum in their own country. In their days of convalescence they happened to amuse themselves trying to work at various trades with which they were familiar. It was noted that their recovery was stimulated; and those incapacitated from following their former trades were managing to acquire a knowledge of some other trade not incompatible with the injuries sustained. The discovery was immediately developed by the Belgian Government, by France, by England, and by Canada until it has become one of the real and permanent benefits arising out of this war; for by this accidental discovery and its growth to present importance civilization has found that there is no necessity for the existence of a man unable to earn; that he can be of use, notwithstanding the seriousness of his injury.

Under the forced draft of necessity this system has been perfected to a wonderful degree. The United States Government has adopted it, and is now retraining and vocationally rehabilitating such of its disabled soldiers, sailors, and marines as require it, in order that they may continue to be useful individuals in civil life. This work was confided by Congress, without a dissenting vote, to the Federal Board for Vocational Education, the bill being approved June 27, 1918, and within less than nine weeks afterwards the first man was placed for reeducation. The United States system goes further than that of most of the continental countries, for in addition to training the disabled man it also finds a place for him in which to work at whatever he has been trained to do. The Federal board has a placement division and so arranges matters that when the men under training are competent in their respective lines employment will be ready and waiting for them.

The Government allows a support fund of at least \$65 per month for each man while he is undergoing this process of rehabilitation, with allotments to his dependents upon a fairly liberal scale. The reeducation is absolutely free, all expense of books, tuition, library, laboratory, or other fees being paid by the Government. The training is given in the best institutions of the United States, ranging from Harvard and Yale, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Case School of Applied Science, Columbia University, and the various land-grant colleges of the States, to agricultural schools, scientific schools, trade and industrial schools, and, in many instances, direct to the industries and commerce. Altogether there are some 500 trades, professions, occupations, callings, and industries from which a choice may be made by the disabled man. He is by no means confined to manual trades or occupations. The sole animating and dominating thought and object of the Government, as expressed and carried out through its agent, the Federal Board for Vocational Education, is to do that thing for the disabled man which will insure to him the greatest possibility of future usefulness, happiness, and contentment, according to his capabilities.

Fourteen district or branch offices have been established by the Federal board, respectively, at Boston, New York, Philadelphia, Washington, Atlanta, New Orleans, Cincinnati, Chicago, St. Louis, Minneapolis, Denver, San Francisco, Seattle, and Dallas. These district offices were established so as to enable the Federal board to reach disabled men in all sections of the country and to handle their cases with greater dispatch and thoroughness than if the work was all concentrated at Washington. The total Federal force of the Government scattered throughout the 14 districts is about 250 men. All of them have qualified under civil-service requirements for the special positions which they hold.

By the policy of placing these disabled men in the existing institutions of the country it is figured that the Government has been saved over \$25,000,000, which would have been a reasonable cost had all the men in training and to be trained been assembled in one or two institutions especially provided and controlled by the Federal Government. By using the existing institutions of America, representing an investment of over \$300,000,000, there is available for the disabled man an infi-

nitely greater opportunity than could possibly be given under any institution inaugurated especially for this work. Placing the men in existing institutions instead of herding them in great camps of crippled and disabled men has a beneficial effect upon the men themselves, causing them to lose sight of their disabilities and to minimize them and concentrate their attention upon the capabilities remaining to them.

This is, in effect, the secret—if there is a secret—about the success of rehabilitation work, which is simply to disregard the disability and concentrate on the remaining assets, taking them and training the men to make use of them to their fullest extent. It may be illustrated by the case of a man who has lost both his legs. He could be made into a very efficient tailor, doubtless, because the tailor's work is done with his hands, and the presence or absence of pedal extremities has no bearing whatever upon the character of work he does or his ability to do work with his hands and arms. The same principle prevails throughout many varieties of work.

This, in brief, is the program of the United States Government for its disabled men. In addition to this retraining by which these men are often enabled to earn wages greatly in excess of those which they were making in civil life before the war, they are given their compensation for the injuries received, and this compensation is absolutely unaffected by any increase in earning capacity occasioned by the retraining. This compensation begins after the training allowance ends and this training allowance ends when the man has been made competent in his line and is placed in a position and goes upon the pay roll. Then his compensation starts and is in addition to whatever he may earn.

There will be no more useless, embittered men wearing their lives away in soldiers' homes. There will be no more of veterans depending upon a pittance of a pension, feeling that they are apart from the ordinary run of men and that the doors of opportunity are closed to them. Each man will be restored to the equality of opportunity and the light of hope and happiness rekindled in each bosom.

Congress has passed the best, and on the whole the most liberal, law of all the countries for the reeducation and placement in employment of the disabled heroes of the war and will not spare the money necessary to extend the benefits of this act to all those wounded or diseased in the service of the country. Private organizations of a semipublic character, like the American Red Cross and the National Catholic War Council, have given liberally of their funds to the special fund for rehabilitation provided under the act by which gifts and donations may be received and used to supplement the funds provided by Congress to carry out its provisions.

Some things absolutely necessary, however, to the success of this work were not and probably could not be provided or anticipated by the Congress when the vocational rehabilitation act was passed. Experience has shown that publicity through every possible means must be extended to every portion of the country—cities, towns, hamlets, and lonely farms—in order to furnish information to discharged men and to their families concerning the liberal provisions which have been made to make the future of disabled men safe for themselves and their de-

pendents. This requires the use of bulletin, pamphlet, tract, magazine, newspaper, billboard, and the film service, which is our greatest agency to-day for reaching the great mass of the American people. Such a program involves in many of its aspects an expenditure of money such as a public agency probably could not be expected to provide. Seeing this, the National Elks' War Relief Commission has arranged to underwrite for a voluntary committee working in cooperation with the Federal board the cost of a program of publicity which shall inform every disabled man and his family of his rights and opportunities and to call to the attention of the employers, wageworkers, and the public their duty of cooperation in this matter and the ways in which they can be of most vital help.

Many men who are entitled to the benefits of the war-risk insurance act and of the vocational-rehabilitation act have been discharged from the service and are scattered throughout the country. In many instances these men are not even aware up to the present time of their rights and opportunities. They are knocking in rapidly increasing numbers at the door of the district offices of the Federal board asking for help. They are without their Army pay as discharged men. Their allotments and allowances to their dependents have ceased. With their handicaps they are unable to earn a living. While their compensation cases are being adjudicated it has been impossible for the Federal board to put these men primarily into training. They suffer privation and humiliation and oftentimes give up in despair their hope of taking the reeducation which the Federal board is willing to provide for them as soon as they are adjudged to be compensable cases. By the use of the fund which the National Elks War Relief Commission has provided an act can be performed lying entirely outside the purview of the vocational-rehabilitation act, and absolutely necessary for its successful administration and to the welfare of the men for whom the act was designed. Loans to the men can be made promptly at the district offices of the Federal board in order that they may be put into training immediately. This is necessary since it is not possible for any Government agency to pay money to men in advance to put them in training. Arrangements will be made so that these loans will be paid back by the men as soon as they have received the amounts due them from the Government. In this way the soldier will be treated not as a problem of social relief but as a soldier of the Republic in straitened circumstances because assets due him from the Government are unpaid. As the result it will be possible for the Federal board to put at least a thousand men in training almost immediately whose cases have been dragging for many weeks.

Rising to meet this situation the War Risk Insurance Bureau has promptly agreed that on the face of certain records furnished by the Federal board it will accept the cases as being prima facie compensable and will place the man upon their compensation lists and send his checks to him promptly. With these two devices it will be possible to speed up from 60 to 120 days all the whole program of the care and treatment, education, and placement of disabled soldiers, sailors, and marines.

With the same vision and broad liberality the National Elks War Relief Commission has provided through its funds for the

entire support and training of these worthy men who, because of any technicality, lie outside the purview of the war-risk insurance act, and therefore of the vocational rehabilitation act. A man who was injured by some accident previous to October 6, 1917, will be cared for under this arrangement. Those who, for technical reasons, are ruled not to be entitled to compensation, who need retraining because of injuries or disease incurred in the service, will be cared for. In addition, those American citizens who rushed to the support of the allies before we entered the war by joining one of the allied armies, or who since we entered the war have, in the spirit of adventure, entered other services and were injured while fighting the Hun, are to be reeducated and placed in employment through the medium of the fund which the Elks have provided. As the Members of Congress will instantly recognize, this is not possible under the war-risk insurance act or the vocational rehabilitation act, since both provide only for those who are disabled in the service of the United States against Germany and her allies. Foreigners serving in our National Army are entitled to the benefit of the two acts, but American citizens serving with the allies are not. Hence the liberal provision which the Elks have made to cover their cases, in order that they, too, may have a chance for the future, and the country may be saved from the sad spectacle of dependency on the part of those willing to give their all in the fight for democracy.

Realizing the above program and desiring to participate directly in it, the Benevolent and Protective Order of Elks, through the National Elks War Relief Commission, has placed at the disposal of the Federal board a quarter of a million dollars to be used in this humane and practical work, enabling the Federal board to carry on much of its work without being subjected to the delay of technical rules and regulations, which, in many cases, would defeat the object of the vocational education law.

The Elks fund thus provided is the first instance of the kind in the history of the country where a great patriotic fraternal organization has come to the aid of the Government in so timely, helpful, and substantial a manner. This money will be used to help disabled men who desire to enter immediately upon vocational training, but who are without funds to meet their immediate needs.

The necessity for quick action in getting these men into training and the obstacles facing the Federal board by a lack of elasticity in the appropriation of Government funds all tend toward bringing about a situation in which thousands of worthy cases would themselves suffer, as well as the helpless and innocent dependents of these soldiers, sailors, and marines who have been victims of war. The Elks, with their generosity, have enabled the Federal board to act quickly and rescue many of these cases and prevent a continuance of conditions which in numerous instances have been found most distressing.

